

Public Engagement Project

at the University of Massachusetts Amherst

Bringing Research to the Public



Science Communication

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Amy Schalet,
Associate Professor of Sociology
Director, Public Engagement Project
University of Massachusetts Amherst

1. Public engagement efforts fall along a broad spectrum



Engaging with:

- the media
- policy makers
- the courts
- advocacy groups
- professional and practitioner organizations
- museums, schools and other educational institutions

- Public engagement involves numerous types of activities that can vary across disciplines, research topic and the proclivities of individual scholars

2. Effective public engagement is relational



- Public engagement requires building relationships and networks outside the academy
- These allow one to forge two-way channels of communication.
- It is through these relationships that scholars learn how to translate their research for broader publics.
- Such relationships also have the potential for enhancing basic research.



“I am looking for something I can only call companionship: other people who are, like me, trying to understand what the hell is going on here, in the society or societies we find ourselves embedded in”

-- Barbara Ehrenreich. “A Journalists Plea.”
In *Public Sociology*, Dan Clawson et al., eds.
University of California Press, 2007.

Find “Your People”



- **Media:**
 - Who Covers Your Topics the Way You Like?
- **Professions:**
 - What Groups Can Use What You know?
- **Advocacy:**
 - Who wants to Run with What You Have?
- **Policy Makers:**
 - What Is Viable to Ask Within Their Limits?

Build relationships and get to know your publics



- What about your research is of interest to them?
- How can publics **use** your research to do their jobs?
- What formats must your research take to be useable?

Moving Laterally to Move Ahead



- Expand your knowledge cross-disciplinarily
- Make the same analytic point(s) over and over
... while saying it differently for different audiences
- Make recommendations, even if they are “basic”

1. Why Write Opinion Editorials?



- Investment in public education/dialogue
- Expand reach of research dissemination
- Opportunity for different form of prose
- Demonstrate relevance/impact research

2. How Long Does it Take?



- Less time than you might think if you have:
 - Original/new take on conventional problem/issue
 - ✦ Can be with your own research or others' research
 - Familiarity/facility with the Op-ed format
 - ✦ Practice the format in advance so that you can make
 - Creative use of current issues to hook your article on

3. What is the Format?



- 600-1200 words
- Short, active tense sentences
- Paragraphs 1 to 5 sentences
- Motivate the article in terms of real-life, real-world relevance
- The main point is made in first paragraph (or 3-5th sentence)
- In addition to analysis, there has to be a normative take away
- Use a few compelling statistics but only the key ones
- Make research come alive with stories, anecdotes, personal voice
- Use metaphor, talk about implications for people, relationships
- You may need to complement your research strength with others'
- Conclude with strong synthesis statement, and humor or heft.

How is It Different From other Academic Writing?



- Don't frame in terms of existing theoretical debates
- No methodological details, even if these really interests you
- Be accurate and current but need not be *super*-precise
- Draw on established knowledge/others' research
- Analysis can be exploratory: can use “may be”, “seems”
- Avoid common meta-narratives from one's own discipline
- Do not write a mini-lecture, must have narrative coherence
- May be more personal, passionate, hopeful, creative

Preparing to Interact with Reporters



- Ask their time frame
- Ask their angle on the story
- Prepare your main message
- 4 or 5 talking points (max)
- Prepare talking about points with non-academic
 - Know how to illustrate the point with story or anecdote
 - Have a few (not too many) statistics if that is helpful
- Prepare bridging
 - Answering and acknowledging the question
 - Redirect the conversation to where you want to go

Preparing to Interact with Reporters



- **What is Your Message**
 - What are your main findings?
 - Why do these findings matter?
 - What should your audience(s) do?

During the Interview



- Prepare
- Know Your Message
- Don't Say too Much
- Strengthen Your Message
- Headline Your Answers
- Keep it Simple
- Speak in 15-20 second phrases

Source: GYMR Public Relations. Conducting Effective Interviews

Reaching out to Specific Reporters



- Main findings
- Main Implications
- Your credentials
- Why now [hook]
- Why them [show you know them]

Some Things Scientists Worry About



- Explaining Causality
- Having Enough Expertise
- Giving others Enough Credit